**Tour of Vietnam**

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*Hanoi*

The old city’s hum awakens the sleeping early, when morning is still tinged with night’s dark haze. Weaves of wires climb telephone poles in a garish fashion, dense black knots edging towards the sky. Small streets swarming with motorbikes; a change in light prompts them to burgeon, burrow their way into every crevice that opens amidst traffic’s throbbing pulse. Paper masks cover every mouth, the atmosphere thick with fumes of exhaust.

*Sa Pa*

Fat rolls of earth sheathed beneath grass glistening with grit and dew. The air is damp, laced with a crisp chill that lingers in low lying valleys. Tiny farms dot their banks; cottages and barns sprinkled sparsely across the landscape. All cloaked beneath a fine mist that seethes from behind the mountains, creeping quietly over their peaks. Ominous navy outlines jut sharply across a blank grey abyss, the slopes’ edges and cliffs smudged in fresh light.

*Ha Long Bay*

Bay of the Descending Dragon; scales unglossed and fragmented left behind in its wake. Abandoned to create a karst kingdom; Earth’s fractions rubbed raw, jutting violently from calm cyan sea. A labyrinth of doomed domes, rounded crowns masked beneath eerie smears of fog. Sand swells slant gently from their edges, their shores smooth, unmarred by human touch. Fish farms are hidden amongst them, webs of rotting wood woven to balance atop translucent water. White fleets peer suspiciously from beyond the crests.

*Ninh Bình*

Electric, vivid panes of green stretched tightly across the Red River Delta. Fields of rice rolling in all directions; they break and split to swallow the mounds, karst constellations. The riverbed bends around their maze, its steady stream severed by surges of gondolas careening through its waters. Dirt roads in villages heavily grooved beneath the weight from wheels; fresh dust from cut stone balloons, floating with grace amidst the humid air. A thick mist smothers all movement, it drapes in groves from the mountain’s cliffed eaves.

*Phong Nha*

Slick, curving roads stained black by early morning rain. They wrap tightly around mountains, through the little town built upon profits of their bulging bellies. A motorbike meandering, cutting through the course alongside tense wind gusts that slice the thick moisture. Winding alongside slopes cloaked with emerald haze, gorgeous gorges between them clouded into obscurity. Caverns carved deep into Earth’s core, anatomies of its rock cracked open, jowls wide and unhinged. Limestone chandeliers bellow from their stone ceilings; dark stone slabs glint gold under artificial glows.

*Huế*

A dense atmosphere, ancient legacies’ clout dwells amongst the streets. An Imperial City dripping in history, a spread of palaces adorned in vicious violet and gold. Chess games played in courtyards; tea sipped from dainty frosted cups in gardens meticulously groomed; odes to worlds past. Canals run weaves across the city, their browned waters murky and opaque. Dong Ba Market: a hub crowded with coffee sellers boasting beans fresh from the highlands; a slew of similar stands selling knock-off Gucci sweaters, polished chopstick sets, paper hats in gaudy, vivid hues.

*Da Nang*

Sprawling, split in two by the rushing river, its wide mouth open, flowing to sea. Marble Mountains grace the Southern horizon, their lush shrubbery fuzzy from a distance. Snug rows of skyscrapers hug the coast to the north, their steel glare softened against the mid-day buffs of smog. China Beach rolls between them, its pane of white sand spanning past the range, chasing oblivion. The shoreline is empty, spare for one sole fisherman dancing blithely across the bank each time a large tide billows in. It is silent, spare for the water’s constant wash.

*Hội An*

A town to be photographed, a place poised to gleam from beneath a postcard’s gloss. A fusion of cultures steeped in the past, alluding to a time quainter in its beauty. Samples of traditional architecture, buildings lined with gold, pink walls worn and faded to charm. Plump bushes of flowers burst through iron-wrought gates, bougainvillea blossoms in fuchsia, fat and full. Tourists move in slow clumps, clogging the cobbled streets; they assess the colorful market stalls painted with produce, the punch of fresh fish staunchly dominating the air. Rainbows of lanterns line the sky, setting the river aglow as day dims to night.

*Nha Trang*

The poem of a solo swimmer, alone amidst stonewashed sea. White caps curl lazily towards the beach, their motions lazy and slowed. Water sweeps across the shore; foam flurries smooth against sand before slinking back into the greyed gulf. A hazy blue canopy drapes from above; swollen cloud clusters dot the distance. A beach bustling with families; Vietnamese and Russian conversations melt together with the wind, notes punctuated with children’s high-pitched squeals. The city’s roar remains muted against the waves.

*Đà Lạt*

Nestled deep within the highlands; air crisp and cool, it evokes a sense of clarity opposite the gauzy ocean dream. Flower fields run wild over the hills to paint them rosy red, lemon and plum. Mounds of mini Sierras huddle around the city in a thick crest, their planes dense with greenery rampant and rugged. A compound rests in its basin’s low belly, the last door down a narrow alleyway. Its common room is clouded with sweet smoke; a long, cracked coffee table lined with mismatched card decks and dewy beer bottles. The Eagles’ whiney croon seeps from a stereo as noon’s beams beat in through open windowpanes.

*Ho Chi Minh City*

A monstrous city, pressed and spread wide beneath humidity’s bulbous weight. Plastic coolers line its wide sidewalks, concrete marred dark with moisture. Coolers that bear fruits: iced coffee laden with cream and sugary grit, sweet folds of mango, jackfruit’s tangy gum. Bui Vien; a rumbling strip alight with flickering neon, laughing gas balloons hugging signs that brag of cheap beer. Blurry beats bleed from open doorways; dancers spill from overcrowded pubs into the road, their limbs flowing fluidly. Corners host small cafes with families lounging over red plastic stools. Steam emanates from bowls of pho, sweetly dissolving into the full night air.